

Final recommendations on the  
future electoral arrangements  
for Hart in Hampshire

Report to the Secretary of State for the  
Environment, Transport and the Regions

*July 2000*

LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND

# LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND

This report sets out the Commission's final recommendations on the electoral arrangements for the district of Hart in Hampshire.

Members of the Commission are:

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A large map illustrating the proposed ward boundaries for Fleet and Yateley is inserted inside the back cover of the report.





## Local Government Commission for England

25 July 2000

Dear Secretary of State

On 20 July 1999 the Commission began a periodic electoral review of Hart under the Local Government Act 1992. We published our draft recommendations in January 2000 and undertook an eight-week period of consultation.

We have now prepared our final recommendations in the light of the consultation. We have substantially confirmed our draft recommendations, although one modification has been made (see paragraphs 95-96) in the light of further evidence. This report sets out our final recommendations for changes to electoral arrangements in Hart.

We recommend that Hart District Council should be served by 35 councillors representing 18 wards, and that changes should be made to ward boundaries in order to improve electoral equality, having regard to the statutory criteria. We recommend that the Council should continue to hold elections by thirds.

The local Government Bill, containing legislative proposals for a number of changes to local authority electoral arrangements, is currently being considered by Parliament. However, until such time as that new legislation is in place we are obliged to conduct our work in accordance with current legislation, and to continue our current approach to periodic electoral reviews.

I would like to thank members and officers of the District Council and other local people who have contributed to the review. Their co-operation and assistance have been very much appreciated by Commissioners and staff.

Yours sincerely

PROFESSOR MALCOLM GRANT  
Chairman



## SUMMARY

The Commission began a review of Hart on 20 July 1999. We published our draft recommendations for electoral arrangements on 18 January 2000, after which we undertook an eight-week period of consultation.

- **This report summarises the representations we received during consultation on our draft recommendations, and contains our final recommendations to the Secretary of State.**

We found that the existing electoral arrangements provide unequal representation of electors in Hart:

- **in 11 of the 16 wards the number of electors represented by each councillor varies by more than 10 per cent from the average for the district and eight wards vary by more than 20 per cent from the average;**
- **by 2004 electoral equality is not expected to improve, with the number of electors per councillor forecast to vary by more than 10 per cent from the average in 12 wards and by more than 20 per cent in 10 wards.**

Our main final recommendations for future electoral arrangements (Figures 1 and 2 and paragraphs 95-96) are that:

- **Hart District Council should have 35 councillors, the same as at present;**
- **there should be 18 wards, instead of 16 as at present;**
- **the boundaries of all of the existing wards should be modified, resulting in a net increase of two;**
- **elections should continue to take place by thirds.**

These recommendations seek to ensure that the number of electors represented by each district councillor is as nearly as possible the same, having regard to local circumstances.

- **In 14 of the proposed 18 wards the number of electors per councillor would vary by no more than 10 per cent from the district average, and two wards would vary by more than 20 per cent.**
- **This improved level of electoral equality is forecast to continue, with the number of electors per councillor in only three wards expected to vary by more than 10 per cent from the average for the district in 2004 and one ward by more than 20 per cent.**

Recommendations are also made for changes to parish council electoral arrangements which provide for:

- **revised warding arrangements and the redistribution of councillors for the parishes of Crookham Village, Blackwater & Hawley and Yateley.**

All further correspondence on these recommendations and the matters discussed in this report should be addressed to the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, who will not make an order implementing the Commission's recommendations before 5 September 2000.

**The Secretary of State  
Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions  
Local Government Sponsorship Division  
Eland House  
Bressenden Place  
London SW1E 5DU**

*Figure 1: The Commission's Final Recommendations: Summary*

	<b>Ward name</b>	<b>Number of councillors</b>	<b>Constituent areas</b>	<b>Map reference</b>
1	Blackwater & Hawley	2	Hawley ward (part – the Blackwater and proposed Minley parish wards of Blackwater & Hawley parish)	Map 2 and Large map
2	Church Crookham East (in Fleet)	2	Church Crookham ward (part)	Map 2 and Large map
3	Church Crookham West (in Fleet)	2	Church Crookham ward (part); Crondall ward (part – the proposed Zebon parish ward of Crookham Village parish); Fleet Courtmoor ward (part)	Maps 2, A4 and large map
4	Crondall	2	Crondall ward (part – the parish of Crondall and the proposed Crookham Village parish ward of Crookham Village parish)	Maps 2, A3, A4 and large map
5	Eversley	1	Eversley ward; Whitewater ward (part – the parishes of Heckfield and Mattingley)	Map 2 and large map
6	Fleet Central	2	Fleet West ward (part); Fleet Pondtail ward (part)	Map 2 and Large map
7	Fleet Courtmoor	2	Fleet Courtmoor ward (part)	Map 2 and Large map
8	Fleet North	2	Fleet West ward (part); Hawley ward (part – the proposed Ancells parish ward of Blackwater & Hawley)	Map 2 and Large map
9	Fleet Pondtail	2	Fleet Pondtail ward (part)	Map 2 and Large map
10	Fleet West	2	Crondall ward (part – the proposed Netherhouse parish ward of Crookham Village parish); Fleet West ward (part)	Map 2 and large map
11	Frogmore & Darby Green	2	Frogmore & Darby Green ward (part – the proposed Frogmore & Darby Green parish ward of Yateley parish)	Map 2 and Large map
12	Hartley Wintney	2	Hartley Wintney ward (part – the parish of Hartley Wintney)	Map 2 and large map
13	Hook	3	Hook ward (the parish of Hook); Whitewater ward (part – the parish of Rotherwick)	Map 2
14	Long Sutton	1	Long Sutton ward; Odiham ward (part – the Odiham Airfield parish ward of Odiham parish)	Maps 2 and A2
15	Odiham	2	Crondall ward (part – the parish of Dogmersfield); Hartley Wintney ward (part – the parish of Winchfield); Odiham ward (part – the Odiham and North Warnborough parish wards of Odiham parish)	Maps 2 and A2
16	Yateley East	2	Yateley East ward (the proposed Yateley East parish ward of Yateley parish)	Map 2 and Large map

	<b>Ward name</b>	<b>Number of councillors</b>	<b>Constituent areas</b>	<b>Map reference</b>
17	Yateley North	2	Yateley North ward (the proposed Yateley North parish ward of Yateley parish)	Large map
18	Yateley West	2	Yateley West ward (the proposed Yateley West parish ward of Yateley parish)	Large map

*Notes: 1 The district of Hart is parished except for the town of Fleet comprising the seven wards indicated above.*

*2 Map 2, Appendix A and the large map in the back of the report illustrate the proposed wards outlined above.*

Figure 2: The Commission's Final Recommendations for Hart

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (1999)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2004)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1	Blackwater & Hawley	2	3,472	1,736	-6	3,532	1,766	-8
2	Church Crookham East	2	3,888	1,944	5	3,865	1,933	1
3	Church Crookham West	2	3,499	1,750	-5	3,696	1,848	-4
4	Crondall	2	2,911	1,456	-21	3,541	1,771	-8
5	Eversley	1	2,063	2,063	12	2,060	2,060	7
6	Fleet Central	2	3,988	1,994	8	3,938	1,969	3
7	Fleet Courtmoor	2	3,920	1,960	6	3,863	1,932	1
8	Fleet North	2	1,891	946	-49	3,032	1,516	-21
9	Fleet Pondtail	2	3,820	1,910	3	3,783	1,892	-1
10	Fleet West	2	3,962	1,981	7	3,855	1,928	0
11	Frogmore & Darby Green	2	4,279	2,140	16	4,261	2,131	11
12	Hartley Wintney	2	3,948	1,974	7	4,257	2,129	11
13	Hook	3	5,660	1,887	2	6,026	2,009	5
14	Long Sutton	1	1,713	1,713	-7	1,740	1,740	-9
15	Odiham	2	3,556	1,778	-4	3,680	1,840	-4
16	Yateley East	2	4,076	2,038	10	4,078	2,039	6
17	Yateley North	2	3,982	1,991	8	3,951	1,976	3
18	Yateley West	2	4,021	2,011	9	4,016	2,008	5
	<b>Totals</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>64,649</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>67,174</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>
	<b>Averages</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>1,847</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>1,919</b>	<b>-</b>

Source: Electorate figures are based on Hart District Council's submission.

Note: The 'variance from average' column shows by how far, in percentage terms, the number of electors per councillor varies from the average for the district. The minus symbol (-) denotes a lower than average number of electors. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.



# 1 INTRODUCTION

1 This report contains our final recommendations on the electoral arrangements for the district of Hart in Hampshire. We have now reviewed the 11 districts in Hampshire and Portsmouth and Southampton city councils as part of our programme of periodic electoral reviews (PERs) of all 386 principal local authority areas in England. Our programme started in 1996 and is currently expected to be completed by 2004.

2 This was our first review of the electoral arrangements of Hart. The last such review was undertaken by our predecessor, the Local Government Boundary Commission (LGBC), which reported to the Secretary of State in 1976 (Report No. 129). The electoral arrangements of Hampshire County Council were last reviewed in 1980 (Report No. 397). We intend reviewing the County Council's electoral arrangements in 2002.

3 In undertaking these reviews, we have had regard to:

- the statutory criteria contained in section 13(5) of the Local Government Act 1992, ie the need to:
  - (a) reflect the identities and interests of local communities; and
  - (b) secure effective and convenient local government;
- the *Rules to be Observed in Considering Electoral Arrangements* contained in Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972.

4 We are required to make recommendations to the Secretary of State on the number of councillors who should serve on the District Council, and the number, boundaries and names of wards. We can also make recommendations on the electoral arrangements for parish and town councils in the district.

5 We have also had regard to our *Guidance and Procedural Advice for Local Authorities and Other Interested Parties* (third edition published in October 1999), which sets out our approach to the reviews.

6 In our *Guidance*, we state that we wish wherever possible to build on schemes which have been prepared locally on the basis of careful and effective consultation. Local interests are normally in a better position to judge what council size and ward configuration are most likely to secure effective and convenient local government in their areas, while allowing proper reflection of the identities and interests of local communities.

7 The broad objective of PERs is to achieve, so far as practicable, equality of representation across the district as a whole. Our aim is to achieve as low a level of electoral imbalance as is practicable, having regard to our statutory criteria. We will require particular justification for schemes which would result in, or retain, an electoral imbalance of over 10 per cent in any ward. Any imbalances of 20 per cent or more should only arise in the most exceptional circumstances, and will require the strongest justification

8 We are not prescriptive on council size. We start from the general assumption that the existing council size already secures effective and convenient local government in that district but we are willing to look carefully at arguments why this might not be so. However, we have found it necessary to safeguard against upward drift in the number of councillors, and we believe that any proposal for an increase in council size will need to be fully justified: in particular, we do not accept that an increase in a district's electorate should automatically result in an increase in the number of councillors, nor that changes should be made to the size of a district council simply to make it more consistent with the size of other districts.

9 In July 1998, the Government published a White Paper, *Modern Local Government – In Touch with the People*, which set out legislative proposals for local authority electoral arrangements. In two-tier areas, it proposed introducing a pattern in which both the district and county councils would hold elections every two years, ie in year one half of the district council would be elected, in year two half the county council would be elected, and so on. The Government stated that local accountability would be maximised where every elector has an opportunity to vote every year, thereby pointing to a pattern of two-member wards (and divisions) in two-tier areas. However, it stated that there was no intention to move towards very large electoral areas in sparsely populated rural areas, and that single-member wards (and electoral divisions) would continue in many authorities. The proposals are now being taken forward in a Local Government Bill, published in December 1999, and are currently being considered by Parliament.

10 Following publication of the White Paper, we advised all authorities in our 1999/2000 PER programme, including the Hampshire districts, that the Commission would continue to maintain its current approach to PERs as set out in the October 1999 *Guidance*. Nevertheless, we considered that local authorities and other interested parties might wish to have regard to the Secretary of State's intentions and legislative proposals in formulating electoral schemes as part of PERs of their areas.

11 This review was in four stages. Stage One began on 20 July 1999, when we wrote to Hart District Council inviting proposals for future electoral arrangements. We also notified Hampshire County Council, Hampshire Police Authority, Hampshire Association of Parish and Town Councils, parish and town councils in the district, the Members of Parliament with constituency interests in the district and the Members of the European Parliament for the South East region, and the headquarters of the main political parties. We placed a notice in the local press, issued a press release and invited the District Council to publicise the review further. The closing date for receipt of representations, the end of Stage One, was 25 October 1999. At Stage Two we considered all the representations received during Stage One and prepared our draft recommendations.

12 Stage Three began on 18 January 2000 with the publication of our report, *Draft recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for Hart in Hampshire*, and ended on 13 March. Comments were sought on our preliminary conclusions. Finally, during Stage Four we reconsidered our draft recommendations in the light of the Stage Three consultation and now publish our final recommendations.

## 2 CURRENT ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS

13 The district of Hart is situated in the north of the county of Hampshire, with the districts of Rushmoor to its east and Basingstoke & Deane to its west, and the counties of Surrey to the east and Berkshire to the north. The district covers an area of over 21,500 hectares and, with a population of nearly 81,000, has a population density of nearly 4 persons per hectare. The area has experienced considerable growth in the last 20 years due to the district's position in the M3 corridor, with good transport links to surrounding areas and towns (such as Basingstoke, Farnborough and Guildford) and London.

14 The main town in the district is Fleet, with smaller settlements in Yateley, Hook and Hartley Wintney. The district contains 17 parishes, but Fleet town itself is unparished and comprises nearly 30 per cent of the district's total electorate.

15 To compare levels of electoral inequality between wards, we calculated the extent to which the number of electors per councillor in each ward (the councillor:elector ratio) varies from the district average in percentage terms. In the text which follows, this calculation may also be described using the shorthand term 'electoral variance'.

16 The electorate of the district is 64,649 (February 1999). The Council presently has 35 members who are elected from 16 wards, nine of which are relatively urban, of which four are in Fleet, three in Yateley and one each in Hook and Hartley Wintney. The remaining wards are predominantly rural. Six of the wards are each represented by three councillors, seven are each represented by two councillors and three are single-member wards. The Council is elected by thirds.

17 Since the last electoral review there has been an increase in the electorate in Hart district, with around 44 per cent more electors per councillor than two decades ago as a result of new housing developments. The most notable increases have been in Fleet, Church Crookham and Hook.

18 At present, each councillor represents an average of 1,847 electors, which the District Council forecasts will increase to 1,919 by the year 2004 if the present number of councillors is maintained. However, due to demographic and other changes over the past two decades, the number of electors per councillor in 11 of the 16 wards varies by more than 10 per cent from the district average, in eight wards by more than 20 per cent and in five wards by more than 30 per cent. The worst imbalance is in Hook ward where the councillor represents 42 per cent more electors than the district average.

*Map 1: Existing Wards in Hart*

Figure 3: Existing Electoral Arrangements

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (1999)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2004)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1	Blackwater & Hawley	3	4,247	1,416	-23	4,289	1,430	-26
2	Church Crookham	3	4,987	1,662	-10	4,957	1,652	-14
3	Crondall	2	5,100	2,550	38	5,944	2,972	55
4	Eversley	1	1,326	1,326	-28	1,317	1,317	-31
5	Fleet Courtmoor	3	5,371	1,790	-3	5,291	1,764	-8
6	Fleet Pondtail	3	5,378	1,793	-3	5,326	1,775	-7
7	Fleet West	3	6,528	2,176	18	7,556	2,519	31
8	Frogmore & Darby Green	3	4,294	1,431	-23	4,276	1,425	-26
9	Hartley Wintney	2	4,416	2,208	20	4,725	2,363	23
10	Hook	2	5,233	2,617	42	5,591	2,796	46
11	Long Sutton	1	1,159	1,159	-37	1,186	1,186	-38
12	Odiham	2	3,382	1,691	-8	3,508	1,754	-9
13	Whitewater	1	1,164	1,164	-37	1,178	1,178	-39
14	Yateley East	2	3,747	1,874	1	3,749	1,875	-2
15	Yateley North	2	3,294	1,647	-11	3,264	1,632	-15
16	Yateley West	2	5,023	2,512	36	5,017	2,509	31
	<b>Totals</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>64,649</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>67,174</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>
	<b>Averages</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>1,847</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>1,919</b>	<b>-</b>

Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided by Hart District Council.

Note: The 'variance from average' column shows by how far, in percentage terms, the number of electors per councillor varies from the average for the district. The minus symbol (-) denotes a lower than average number of electors. For example, in 1999, electors in Long Sutton and Whitewater wards were relatively over-represented by 37 per cent, while electors in Hook ward were relatively under-represented by 42 per cent. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.



### 3 DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

19 During Stage One we received 14 representations, including a district-wide scheme from Hart District Council, eight parish councils, one town council, one county councillor, two district councillors and an alternative scheme for north-west Hart from six district councillors. In the light of these representations and evidence available to us, we reached preliminary conclusions which were set out in our report, *Draft recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for Hart in Hampshire*.

20 Our draft recommendations were based on the District Council's proposals, which achieved some improvement in electoral equality, and proposed 15 two-member wards, two single-member ward and one three-member ward. However, we moved away from the District Council's scheme in relation to four areas in the unparished area of Fleet. We proposed that:

- Hart District Council should be served by 35 councillors, the same as at present, representing 18 wards, two more than at present;
- the boundaries of all of the existing wards should be modified;
- there should be revised warding arrangements and the redistribution of councillors for the parishes of Blackwater & Hawley, Crookham Village and Yateley.

#### **Draft Recommendation**

Hart District Council should comprise 35 councillors, serving 18 wards. The Council should continue to hold elections by thirds.

21 Our proposals would have resulted in significant improvements in electoral equality, with the number of electors per councillor in 14 of the 18 wards varying by no more than 10 per cent from the district average and two varying by more than 20 per cent. This level of electoral equality was forecast to improve further, with only three wards varying by more than 10 per cent and none by more than 20 per cent from the average in 2004.



## 4 RESPONSES TO CONSULTATION

22 During the consultation on our draft recommendations report, 13 representations were received. A list of all respondents is available on request from the Commission. All representations may be inspected at the offices of Hart District Council and the Commission.

### **Hart District Council**

23 The District Council broadly supported our draft recommendations. However, it regarded the proposed boundary between Fleet North, Central and West wards as unsatisfactory. The Council argued that this boundary would separate properties to the north of the boundary from adjacent ones and would place these properties into a ward with which they have no links. It also noted that the electorate of Fleet North was due to grow “inexorably” after 2004 which would lead to pressure for a “further ad hoc review before the next PER takes place”. The Council stated that if we did not alter its draft recommendations, we would have to make a minor adjustment to include two houses in Fleet Central ward rather than Fleet North as access to them is from Waverley Avenue.

24 The Council also supported the case for a four-member ward covering seven parishes in north-west Hart (Bramshill, Eversley, Harley Wintney, Heckfield, Mattingley, Rotherwick and Winchfield). It stated that it “recognised the Commission’s views on wards which return more than three councillors” but felt that there were special circumstances which warranted consideration of this proposal. The Council believed that Hook should retain three councillors “notwithstanding their revised view that Rotherwick should not be part of the Hook ward”.

25 It notified us that they were putting forward proposals for minor changes to parish boundaries to the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions. It also pointed out that references in our draft recommendations report to “Odiham Airfield Parish Ward” were incorrect and provided an order showing the correct title of this ward to be “RAF Station” parish ward. Another order was also supplied which showed the correct distribution of councillors within Crondall parish as being seven councillors in Crondall parish ward and five in Ewshot parish ward.

### **Parish and Town Councils**

26 We received representations from one town council (Yateley) and six parish councils (Greywell, Dogmersfield, Mattingley, Hook, Odiham and Winchfield). Yateley Town Council and Greywell Parish Council fully supported our draft recommendations. Dogmersfield Parish Council indicated that it was also content to be transferred from the Crondall Ward to Odiham ward.

27 Mattingley Parish Council objected to our proposed single-member Eversley ward and stated that it was not “credible” that the electorate of Eversley ward would decline in 2004. It also argued that paragraph 19 of the draft recommendations report had misrepresented the rural/urban balance of Hart. It also proposed three alternative arrangements for the seven parishes in north-

west Hart, as it maintained that Hook and Rotherwick did not want to be part of the same ward. It supported the idea of a four-member ward for north-west Hart, and a two-member ward comprising the parishes of Rotherwick, Mattingley, Heckfield, Bramshill and Eversley or this combination with an added 'West Green' ward taken from Hartley Wintney.

28 Hook Parish Council argued that the communities of Rotherwick and Hook have two very different identities with different interests and therefore opposed combining Rotherwick and Hook within the same ward. It suggested that a three-member ward for Hook alone would be sufficient due to the current under-representation.

29 Odiham Parish Council submitted a proposal for a three-member ward for Odiham, "...in view of the late application for a four-member rural ward for Northern Hart", covering the parishes of Odiham, Dogmersfield, Long Sutton, South Warnborough and Greywell. It also opposed the transfer of RAF Station parish ward from Odiham ward to Long Sutton ward because it would be "...psychologically detrimental and impractical". It also argued that the links with RAF Station were "...historically very strong".

30 Winchfield Parish Council stated that it was disappointed with our draft recommendation to combine it in a ward with Odiham and Dogmersfield. It also stated a preference for remaining in a ward with Hartley Wintney, on the grounds that the two parishes had more affinity in geographic and historic terms.

## **Other Representations**

31 A further five representations were received in response to our draft recommendations, from a local organisation, two district councillors, the Chief Executive of Hart District Council and one Member of Parliament. The Rt Hon James Arbuthnot MP expressed his support for the draft recommendations, with the exception of our proposed boundary to the south of Elvetham Road. Graham Jelbart, Chief Executive of the District Council, also objected to the proposed boundary, contending that beyond 2004 the electorate of Fleet North would grow sufficiently to justify an imbalance of 20 per cent.

32 Councillor Stephen Parker registered his opposition to the "artificial" Elvetham Road boundary describing it as "...counterproductive and damaging to convenient and effective local government". He suggested taking an appropriate sized area from Tavistock Road or Dukes Mead and connecting it with a length of Hitches Lane. He reiterated his preference for the railway line to remain as the southern boundary of Fleet North.

33 Zebon Copse Residents' Association criticised the District Council's consultation process and stated that their association had not been invited to contribute. They underlined their affinity with Crookham Village and opposed the creation of a separate parish ward for Zebon Copse. They also expressed their disappointment that anomalies in the external parish boundaries would not be addressed during the course of this review.

34 Councillor Susan Band sent an updated version of 'The Northern Case' concerning the proposal for a four-member ward for north-west Hart. In response to the Commission's guidance which states that a four-member ward could result in an unacceptable dilution of accountability

to the electorate, she argued that “...this is not a concern of either the Parish Councils concerned or the District Councillors of Hart.”

35 Hampshire County Council did not make any specific comments regarding our draft recommendations for Hart District Council.



## 5 ANALYSIS AND FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

36 As described earlier, our prime objective in considering the most appropriate electoral arrangements for Hart is, so far as is reasonably practicable and consistent with the statutory criteria, to achieve electoral equality. In doing so we have regard to section 13(5) of the Local Government Act 1992 – the need to secure effective and convenient local government, and reflect the identities and interests of local communities – and Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972, which refers to the number of electors per councillor being “as nearly as may be, the same in every ward of the district or borough”.

37 In relation to Schedule 11, our recommendations are not intended to be based solely on existing electorate figures, but also on assumptions as to changes in the number and distribution of local government electors likely to take place within the ensuing five years. We also must have regard to the desirability of fixing identifiable boundaries and to maintaining local ties which might otherwise be broken.

38 It is therefore impractical to design an electoral scheme which provides for exactly the same number of electors per councillor in every ward of an authority. There must be a degree of flexibility. However, our approach, in the context of the statutory criteria, is that such flexibility must be kept to a minimum.

39 Our *Guidance* states that we accept that the achievement of absolute electoral equality for the authority as a whole is likely to be unattainable. However, we consider that, if electoral imbalances are to be kept to the minimum, such an objective should be the starting point in any review. We therefore strongly recommend that, in formulating electoral schemes, local authorities and other interested parties should start from the standpoint of absolute electoral equality and only then make adjustments to reflect relevant factors, such as community identity and interests. Regard must also be had to five-year forecasts of change in electorates.

### **Electorate Forecasts**

40 At Stage One the District Council submitted electorate forecasts for the year 2004, projecting an increase in the electorate of some 4 per cent from 64,649 to 67,174 over the five-year period from 1999 to 2004. It expects most of the growth to be in Fleet and Crondall wards, with the most significant growth expected in the Elvetham Heath development in the proposed Fleet North ward. The Council estimated rates and locations of housing development with regard to structure and local plans, and the expected rate of building over the five-year period and assumed occupancy rates. In our draft recommendations report we accepted that this is an inexact science and, having given consideration to the forecast electorates, we were satisfied that they represented the best estimates that could reasonably be made at the time.

41 At Stage Three, Mattingley Parish Council queried the council’s projected electorate figures for Eversley. It contended that it was not credible that the electorate of Eversley would decline over the five-year forecast because of “...the rate of infilling that is continuing and the already mature, aged population with a lower divorce rate in these parishes.” However, the District Council have confirmed that their projected figures are based on Hampshire County Council’s

Small Area Population Forecasts and we therefore remain satisfied that they represent the best estimates currently available.

## **Council Size**

42 As already explained, the Commission's starting point is to assume that the current council size facilitates effective and convenient local government, although we are willing to look carefully at arguments why this might not be the case.

43 Hart District Council is at present served by 35 councillors, and at Stage One the District Council proposed retaining the existing council size. The group of six councillors who proposed a four-member ward in the north-western part of the district proposed increasing the council size to 36 in order to incorporate this four-member ward.

44 In our draft recommendations report we stated that we considered a four-member ward could result in an unacceptable dilution of accountability to the electorate, and concluded that the District Council's scheme for a council size of 35 members would provide the best balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria.

45 During Stage Three we received further support for an increase in council size to 36. Councillor Susan Band sent a copy of "The Northern Case" which argued the case for a four-member ward for rural northern Hart and a subsequent increase in council size to 36 members. She suggested that a four-member ward for this area would have a knock-on effect in reducing electoral imbalance Fleet North ward. Councillor Band also maintained that the forecast increase in electorate for Hart "reinforces the case for one extra councillor" and stated that it was the only case "which has the support of all the parishes and District Councillors concerned." At Stage Three, the District Council supported the six councillors' proposal for a four-member ward for rural north-west Hart and an increase in council size of one to 36. Mattingley Parish Council also expressed its support for this proposal.

46 We have carefully considered the representations received. However, we remain of the opinion that a four-member ward could result in an unacceptable dilution of accountability to the electorate, as stated in our *Guidance*. Having considered the size and distribution of the electorate, the geography and other characteristics of the area, together with the representations received, we remain of the view that a council size of 35 would provide the best balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria.

## **Electoral Arrangements**

47 As set out in our draft recommendations report, we carefully considered all the representations received at Stage One, including the only district-wide scheme from the District Council which built on the current warding arrangements. It put forward a mixture of single- and multi-member wards, with a large increase in the number of two-member wards in light of the Government's White Paper, *Modern Local Government – In Touch with the People*. Councillor Parker argued that single-member wards would be beneficial, but did not provide a detailed scheme.

48 We recognised the improved electoral equality achieved by the District Council's scheme, compared to the existing arrangements. However, we sought to build on these proposals in order to put forward electoral arrangements which would achieve even better electoral equality, having regard to the statutory criteria. In particular, we considered changes to all ward boundaries in order to improve the balance of representation and decided to move away from the district council's proposals in relation to the unparished area of Fleet.

49 We have reviewed our draft recommendations in the light of further evidence and the representations received during Stage Three. For district warding purposes, the following areas, based on existing wards, are considered in turn:

- (a) Fleet (four wards);
- (b) Yateley (four wards);
- (c) Crondall, Odiham and Long Sutton wards;
- (d) Eversley, Hartley Wintney, Hawley, Hook and Whitewater wards.

50 Details of our final recommendations are set out in Figures 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2, in Appendix A and on the large map inserted at the back of this report.

### **Fleet (four wards)**

51 The town of Fleet, the largest in the district, is currently divided into four three-member wards. At present Church Crookham, Fleet Courtmoor and Fleet Pondtail wards have 10 per cent, 3 per cent and 3 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average (14 per cent, 8 per cent and 7 per cent in 2004). Fleet West ward currently has 18 per cent more electors than the district average, increasing to 31 per cent in 2004.

52 At Stage One the District Council proposed increasing the number of wards representing this area from four to seven, each represented by two councillors. It proposed using the Basingstoke Canal as an easily identifiable boundary, with four wards to the north and three wards to the south. It proposed a new Fleet North ward comprising that part of the existing Fleet West ward to the north of the railway line, encompassing the Elvetham Heath area between the railway line and M3 motorway, and the proposed Ancells parish ward of Blackwater & Hawley parish, to the south of the M3 motorway. In the light of the planned housing development in the Elvetham Heath area, it argued that it would be imprudent to plan the re-warding of this part of the urban area without taking account of this assured and continuing growth. It also proposed four minor external parish boundary amendments between the unparished area of Fleet and the parishes of Blackwater & Hawley and Hartley Wintney.

53 The District Council also proposed an amended Fleet Pondtail ward, with those properties to the west of Oakley Park, Albany Court, Crown Gardens, Montrose Close and the Aloes being transferred to the new Fleet Central ward. Under the Council's scheme the new Fleet Central ward would incorporate that area to the west of Fleet Road, south of Kings Road and the western part of the existing Fleet Pondtail ward (described earlier), to the north of the Basingstoke Canal and east of Reading Road North, Campbell Close and Springfield Lane, The Avenue and Church Road, arguing that this would create a ward of predominantly mature housing. The Council proposed a reduced Fleet West ward including that area to the south of the railway line, north of

the Canal and west of Reading Road North and Campbell Close, Springfield Lane, The Avenue and Church Road. It proposed creating a Netherhouse parish ward of Crookham Village parish comprising Netherhouse Moor and adjoining roads, and incorporating this parish ward in the unparished Fleet West ward.

54 To the south of the Canal the Council proposed three wards instead of the existing Fleet Courtmoor and Church Crookham wards. It proposed an amended Fleet Courtmoor ward incorporating that area to the south and east of the Canal, and north of Coxheath Road, Cranford Avenue and east of Sylvan Way. In the remaining south-western part of the unparished Fleet area the Council proposed a new Church Crookham West ward, with the eastern boundary running to the rear of the properties on the east side of Coxheath Road and Sylvan Way, to the north side of Cranford Avenue, to the rear of the properties on the west side of The Verne, along Aldershot Road and to the rear of the properties on the west side of Atbara Road. A new Church Crookham East ward would lie to the east of these roads. It proposed creating a Zebon parish ward of Crookham Village parish comprising the Zebon Copse area to the north of Watery Lane, and incorporating this parish ward in the unparished Church Crookham West ward. These proposals would result in Church Crookham East, Church Crookham West, Fleet Central, Fleet Courtmoor, Fleet Pondtail and Fleet West wards varying from the average number of electors per councillor by no more than 8 per cent currently, and 3 per cent in 2004. Fleet North ward would have 49 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average, improving to 21 per cent in 2004.

55 During Stage One, Crookham Village Parish Council opposed the Council's proposal to create new Netherhouse and Zebon parish wards and transfer these areas to the amended Fleet West and new Church Crookham West wards. It proposed alternative boundaries for the Fleet wards, less these proposed parish wards. Blackwater & Hawley Town Council stated that the residents of Ancells Farm have no real "synergy" with the remaining area of Blackwater and Hawley, and could therefore be incorporated into one of the Fleet or Church Crookham wards.

56 We considered the District Council's two-member ward scheme for the unparished Fleet area and were content to put it forward as our draft recommendation, subject to four minor amendments to improve electoral equality and better reflect community identity. We considered that the Council's proposals for Fleet North ward failed to address the high level of resulting electoral inequality and we therefore proposed that the boundary between Fleet North, Fleet Central and Fleet West wards be modified. We considered a number of alternative options to improve the electoral equality in the proposed Fleet North ward, including incorporating roads to the west and east of Fleet Road near to the station. However, in light of the consequential deterioration in electoral equality in Fleet Pondtail ward, we concluded, on the basis of evidence available to us, that aligning the southern boundary of Fleet North ward to the rear of the properties on, and roads leading from, Elvetham Road would result in the best balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria. This would result in improved electoral equality for Fleet North ward and we considered that after the completion of the Elvetham Heath development, the railway line would become a less dominant boundary.

57 We also proposed that the boundary between Fleet West and Fleet Central wards should run to the west of Peatmoor Close, thereby uniting Peatmoor Close and the two properties to its south with the rest of the properties on Church Road in Fleet Central ward. We proposed that the boundary between Church Crookham East and Church Crookham West wards run to the rear of

the properties on the west side of Chesilton Crescent as this would unite the Verne and Chesilton Crescent within the new Church Crookham East ward and therefore better represent the community identity of the area. In order to unite all of Oakley Park within a single ward and to provide a more easily identifiable ward boundary, we proposed that the boundary between Fleet Pondtail and Fleet Central wards should be aligned to the rear of the properties on the south side of Kings Road.

58 At Stage One, the council proposed minor boundary amendments between the proposed Fleet North ward and Hartley Wintney and Blackwater & Hawley wards, modifying the boundaries between the Fleet unparished area and parishes of Hartley Wintney and Blackwater & Hawley. We recognised that these changes would provide more easily identifiable boundaries for the proposed Fleet North ward and would have a negligible effect on electoral equality, but were unable to put them forward as they do not fall within the remit of this current review; we can only review and make recommendations for changes to parish administrative boundaries as part of a review directed by the Secretary of State.

59 We also considered that our draft recommendation improved upon both the existing arrangements and those put forward by the District Council. They resulted in Church Crookham East, Church Crookham West, Fleet Central, Fleet Courtmoor, Fleet North, Fleet Pondtail and Fleet West wards having electoral variances of 5 per cent, 5 per cent, 3 per cent, 6 per cent, 41 per cent, 3 per cent and 4 per cent respectively (improving significantly to 1 per cent, 4 per cent, 2 per cent, 1 per cent, 13 per cent, 1 per cent and 3 per cent in 2004).

60 At Stage Three, four respondents objected to the proposed Elvetham Road boundary between Fleet North, Fleet Central and Fleet West wards. The District Council regarded this boundary as “unsatisfactory”. The Rt Hon James Arbuthnot MP also opposed the boundary, describing Elvetham Road as being “the wrong side of the railway line and completely unconnected to Fleet North”. The Chief Executive of Hart District Council disagreed with the proposed boundary, as it would divide the ‘Blue Triangle Community’. Councillor Parker objected to the draft proposal on the grounds that it would be “counterproductive and damaging to and potentially destroying the identities and interests of local communities”. He also proposed using an appropriate sized part of Tavistock Road or Dukes Mead, connecting it with a length of Hitches Lane, as an alternative to the Elvetham Road boundary.

61 We have carefully considered all the representations received at Stage Three and have noted the opposition to our proposal to include the Elvetham Road area (to the south of the railway line) in our proposed Fleet North ward in order to reduce the over-representation in that area. In addition, we have noted that there was no local support in favour of our draft recommendation. In the light of this opposition we have reconsidered alternatives to our draft recommendations in order to secure a proposal that would provide for the best balance between achieving electoral equality, reflecting the identities and interests of local communities and providing effective and convenient local government.

62 In the first instance we have looked for proposals that would secure a similar level of electoral equality as under our draft recommendations. We considered the alternative proposal put forward by Councillor Parker. However, we are of the view that it would not substantially improve on our draft recommendations as it would involve transferring a larger number of electors from an area

further away than Elvetham Heath, resulting in a more arbitrary split of a local community. We also approached the Council with a request for alternative warding that would provide for improved or equivalent electoral equality, having received no other alternatives during the consultation period. Officers and councillors considered whether there were any reasonable alternatives to our draft proposal but concluded that there were none.

63 As a consequence of the lack of any obvious and workable alternative to our draft recommendation which would achieve a similar level of electoral equality, it became clear that there were two options open to us: to confirm our draft recommendation, which would secure a good level of electoral equality but, in the light of local views, would divide part of the 'Blue Triangle' community, or to adopt the District Council's Stage One proposal to use the railway line as a boundary, which would result in a higher level of electoral imbalance, but which would provide for a better reflection of community identity by retaining all of the Blue Triangle community within one ward, and secure a more identifiable boundary.

64 The Stage Three responses to our proposals in this area reiterated the Council's Stage One proposal that, as the railway line is a distinct physical boundary, which acts as a significant barrier between the residents of the Blue Triangle area and the extensive new development at Elvetham Heath, it should be retained as a ward boundary. As a consequence, the higher level of electoral variance in the proposed Fleet North ward (49 per cent initially, 21 per cent in 2004) should be tolerated, particularly as the electorate of this area is forecast to grow even further after 2004. These views helped to highlight the fact that the competing factors in this particular case are very finely balanced.

65 We have noted that the justification for the acceptance of a high level of over-representation is partly based on the fact that the forecast electorate in the Elvetham Heath area is expected to increase even more beyond 2004. However, as outlined in our *Guidance*, it is the current and five-year forecast of electorate to which we are statutorily required to have regard.

66 However, we recognise that under Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972 we are obliged to have regard to "any local ties that will be broken by the fixing of any particular ward boundary" and that under section 13(5) of the Local Government Act 1992 we are obliged to have regard to the need to reflect the identities and interests of local communities. In the light of the representations received we are satisfied that there is currently an established community in the Blue Triangle area, whereas the community at Elvetham Heath is one that is only just coming into existence and which will develop over the next few years. Accordingly, we have concluded that our proposed ward boundary would divide an established community, thus breaking existing local ties, in order to combine it with a community that does not yet exist.

67 On balance we have therefore been persuaded to modify our draft recommendations and adopt the District Council's Stage One proposals in this area, utilising the railway line as the southern boundary of the proposed Fleet North ward. While this proposal would result in a worse level of electoral equality in the proposed Fleet North ward than under our draft recommendations and considerably poorer than we would normally seek, we have been persuaded on balance that this is justified given the better reflection of local communities that would result and given the more identifiable boundary that would be secured.

68 Under our final recommendations, as shown on the large map inserted at the back of this report, the number of electors per councillor in the proposed Fleet North ward would be 49 per cent below the district average initially (21 per cent below by 2004), while in the proposed Fleet Central and Fleet West wards the number of electors per councillor would be 8 per cent and 7 per cent above the district average respectively (3 per cent and 1 per cent above in 2004).

### **Yateley (four wards)**

69 The parish of Yateley is situated in the north-east of the district and encompasses the town of Yateley (comprising three two-member wards) and the ward of Frogmore & Darby Green (comprising one three-member ward). The existing Frogmore & Darby, Yateley East, Yateley North and Yateley West wards are all currently under-represented by 23 per cent, 1 per cent, 11 per cent and 36 per cent respectively (26 per cent, 2 per cent, 15 per cent and 31 per cent in 2004).

70 At Stage One the District Council proposed creating four two-member wards by making four minor boundary changes to the existing four wards within the parish of Yateley in order to improve the levels of electoral equality. It proposed retaining the existing boundary between Yateley North and Yateley West to the north of Westfields school, but running the boundary to the north of those properties on Throgmorton Road, and the roads leading from it, thereby removing the existing anomalous northwards spur. Between the wards of Yateley West and Yateley East it proposed redrawing the boundary to the east of the properties on the east side of Tudor Drive and Walnut Close, while between Yateley East and Yateley North wards the District Council proposed redrawing the boundary along the centre of Firglen Drive, Mill Lane, Chandlers Lane and to the west of Mill Farm. It also proposed running the boundary between Yateley East and Frogmore & Darby Green wards to the east of the properties on Priors Lane. It stated that the Country Park area between Yateley East and Frogmore & Darby Green provides a significant physical gap which restricts the scope to adjust the boundary between the two wards.

71 We received a representation from Blackwater & Hawley Town Council proposing that the Frogmore & Darby Green area of Yateley be combined with Hawley ward. It argued that this would provide more effective and convenient local government and would reflect the natural affinity shared by these two areas.

72 We considered the submissions for this area that we received at Stage One. We were content to endorse the Council's amendments for Yateley in light of the improved electoral equality resulting from this scheme, the better reflections of community identity and more easily identifiable boundaries. We were not persuaded that Frogmore & Darby Green and Hawley wards should be combined to form a four-member ward as we considered that this could result in an unacceptable dilution of accountability to the electorate. Our draft recommendations would result in Frogmore & Darby Green, Yateley East, Yateley North and Yateley West wards having 16 per cent, 10 per cent, 8 per cent and 9 per cent more electors respectively than the district average (11 per cent, 6 per cent, 3 per cent and 5 per cent more in 2004).

73 During Stage Three, the District Council supported our proposals in this area, and Yateley Town Council stated that it was "pleased to note that the revised ward boundaries have been accepted" and gave "...its full support" to our proposals. Consequently, given the support for our

draft recommendations for Yateley, we are confirming them as final, as shown on the large map inserted at the back of this report.

### **Crondall, Odiham and Long Sutton wards**

74 These three wards are situated in the south of the district. Crondall ward currently comprises the parishes of Crondall, Crookham Village and Dogmersfield, is represented by two councillors and has 38 per cent more electors than the district average (55 per cent in 2004). Long Sutton ward, comprising the parishes of Greywell, Long Sutton and South Warnborough, is represented by a single councillor and currently has 37 per cent fewer electors than the district average (39 per cent in 2004). Odiham ward, comprising the parish of Odiham, is represented by two councillors and has 8 per cent fewer electors than the district average (9 per cent in 2004).

75 At Stage One the District Council proposed that Dogmersfield parish be transferred from Crondall ward to Odiham ward, and that the proposed Zebon and Netherhouse parish wards of Crookham Village parish be incorporated into the unparished Fleet wards, as described earlier. It argued that this would combine the urban area with two areas very closely related. It proposed that Odiham ward be expanded to incorporate Winchfield parish, but that the RAF Station parish ward (which we incorrectly referred to in our draft recommendations report as Odiham Airfield parish ward) be transferred from Odiham ward to Long Sutton ward.

76 Crookham Village Parish Council did not support the proposals put forward by the District Council for Crookham Village parish. It proposed that the eastern parish and ward boundary be moved eastwards, and that this amended ward be represented by three councillors. Odiham Parish Council opposed the District Council's proposal to transfer RAF Station parish ward to Long Sutton ward, proposing instead that Long Sutton and Odiham wards be combined to form a three-member ward. It argued that there are strong community links between RAF Odiham in RAF Station parish ward and Odiham village that it did not wish to break, and that there were existing links between Odiham and the parishes of Long Sutton ward that would be strengthened through this union. Councillor Leversha, district councillor for Crondall ward, opposed the Council's proposal to remove Dogmersfield parish from Crondall ward and place it in Odiham ward.

77 We carefully considered the representations received at Stage One and, on balance, concluded that the proposals put forward by the District Council offered the best compromise between electoral equality and the statutory criteria. We considered that the Zebon Copse and Netherhouse Moor areas of Crookham Village parish have a stronger community identity with the more urban Fleet area, and were therefore content to incorporate the proposed Zebon parish ward in Church Crookham West ward, and the proposed Netherhouse parish ward in Fleet West ward. We were also content to transfer the parishes of Winchfield and Dogmersfield to Odiham ward, given the improved levels of electoral equality which would result. While we had some sympathy with Odiham Parish Council's proposal for a three-member ward incorporating the proposed Odiham and Long Sutton wards, we considered that this proposal would not be in the interest of community identity, given the geographical size of the resulting three-member ward and the opposition from the parishes comprising Long Sutton ward during the Council's own consultations on this option.

78 Under these proposals all three wards would be over-represented, with the two-member Crondall ward (comprising the Crookham Village parish ward of Crookham Village parish and Crondall parish) having 21 per cent fewer electors than the district average (improving to 8 per cent in 2004). The single-member Long Sutton ward (comprising the parishes of Greywell, Long Sutton and South Warnborough and the RAF Station parish ward of Odiham parish) would have 7 per cent fewer electors than the average (9 per cent in 2004), and the two-member Odiham ward (comprising the parishes of Dogmersfield and Winchfield and the Odiham and North Warnborough parish wards of Odiham parish) would have 4 per cent fewer electors than the average, both now and in 2004.

79 At Stage Three Dogmersfield Parish Council supported our proposal to transfer it from Crondall ward to Odiham ward. Greywell Parish Council supported our draft recommendations, stating that the transferral of RAF Station parish ward to Long Sutton ward “...seems a sensible and logical way of making up the numbers of the electorate”.

80 Zebon Copse Residents’ Association objected to the proposal to create a separate ward for Zebon Copse. It argued that there was a risk of “dividing the parish in the short term and fragmenting it in the longer term.” It also stated its desire to retain “social, cultural and administrative links to Crookham Village”.

81 Odiham Parish Council were disappointed that we had not considered their proposal for a three-member ward in Odiham and argued that it would be “...psychologically detrimental and impractical to transfer RAF Station parish ward to another ward purely to meet the electoral numbers criteria.” It reiterated its Stage One proposal to link Odiham parish with the parishes of Dogmersfield, Long Sutton, South Warnborough and Greywell to create a three-member ward.

82 We have noted Odiham Parish Council’s opposition to the transfer of RAF Station parish ward to Long Sutton and have considered its proposal to join the parish of Odiham with Long Sutton ward to create a three member ward. We have also noted the support from Greywell Parish Council and Dogmersfield Parish Council for our draft recommendations. Having considered all the representations received, we have not been convinced that sufficient evidence has been submitted in support of transferring RAF Station parish ward to justify moving away from our draft recommendations. We are therefore confirming our draft recommendations as final.

83 We have also considered Zebon Copse Residents’ Association’s objections to our draft proposals. However, we consider that Zebon Copse is an urban area with some affinity to Fleet and should therefore be joined with Church Crookham West ward. Furthermore, we have not received any objections from Crookham Village during Stage Three and have also not received any alternative proposals for the area which would justify moving away from our draft recommendations. We therefore confirm our draft recommendations for Crondall, Long Sutton and Odiham wards as final.

### **Eversley, Hartley Wintney, Hawley, Hook and Whitewater wards**

84 These five wards lie across the middle and to the north of the district. Eversley ward, represented by a single councillor and comprising the parishes of Bramshill and Eversley, is over-represented by 28 per cent (31 per cent in 2004), while Hartley Wintney ward, comprising the

parishes of Hartley Wintney and Winchfield, is currently represented by two district councillors and is under-represented by 20 per cent (23 per cent in 2004). Hawley ward, coterminous with the parish of Blackwater & Hawley, is currently represented by three councillors and is over-represented by 23 per cent (26 per cent in 2004). Hook ward, coterminous with the parish of Hook, is currently represented by two councillors and is under-represented by 42 per cent (46 per cent in 2004) while the current Whitewater ward, comprising the parishes of Heckfield, Mattingley and Rotherwick, is represented by a single councillor and is over-represented by 37 per cent (39 per cent in 2004).

85 The District Council proposed creating a new Ancells parish ward in Blackwater & Hawley parish, which would be incorporated in the new Fleet North ward (as described earlier) while renaming the remainder of the existing Hawley ward as Blackwater & Hawley parish ward. It proposed that the amended Hartley Wintney ward should be coterminous with the parish of Hartley Wintney, and that the parish of Winchfield should be transferred to the amended Odiham ward (as described earlier). The District Council addressed the existing over-representation in Whitewater and Eversley wards by proposing that Whitewater ward be divided between Hook and Eversley wards, with Hook ward being enlarged to incorporate Rotherwick parish, and Heckfield and Mattingley parishes being transferred to Eversley ward.

86 We received a further eight representations regarding this northern area during Stage One. Councillor Band, district councillor for Hartley Wintney ward, Councillor Eastwood, district councillor for Eversley ward, Councillor Flowers, district councillor for Hook ward, Councillor Glen, district councillor for Whitewater ward and county councillor for Hartley Wintney division, Councillor Kirkham, district councillor for Hook ward and Councillor Sallis, district councillor for Hartley Wintney ward, submitted a joint proposal regarding the eight parishes of Bramshill, Eversley, Hartley Wintney, Heckfield, Hook, Mattingley, Rotherwick and Winchfield.

87 As a group, they proposed that Hook ward be coterminous with Hook parish, and that it be represented by three councillors. They proposed that the remaining seven parishes be united in a ward that would be represented by four district councillors as the smaller parishes in this proposal “look to ... Hartley Wintney as their rural centre”, stating that it was their collective conclusion that this would be a manageable and cohesive ward. Councillor Glen also wrote separately supporting this scheme, arguing that these parishes’ situation represents a very exceptional circumstance, and that this four-member ward proposal would offer the best possible solution. Support for this four-member ward proposal was also received from Winchfield Parish Council, which expressed a preference for remaining in a ward with Hartley Wintney rather than Odiham, and from Rotherwick Parish Council, which objected to the Council’s proposal to place Rotherwick parish in a ward with Hook parish, arguing that this would reduce the democratic representation of Rotherwick parish.

88 Heckfield and Hartley Wintney parish councils also supported the proposal for a four-member ward arrangement, while Hook Parish Council requested that Hook parish should be represented by three district councillors and warded by itself or with other parishes because of its strong community identity. Mattingley Parish Council proposed that rural wards should not be under-represented and that the current Whitewater ward should not be divided. It also supported the four-member ward proposal from the six district councillors.

89 We carefully considered the representations that we received regarding this northern area of Hart. While we recognised the rationale for the warding arrangement put forward by the six councillors, we believe that the number of councillors returned from each ward should not exceed three other than in exceptional circumstances, as it could result in an unacceptable dilution of accountability to the electorate. In addition, the creation of a four-member ward would result in an electoral inequality of nearly 15 per cent in Odiham ward. We therefore considered that the District Council's proposals for three wards in this area provided more convenient and effective local government, with better levels of electoral equality, and put forward its proposed Blackwater & Hawley, Eversley, Hartley Wintney and Hook wards as part of our draft recommendations. The resulting two-member Blackwater & Hawley ward, comprising the Blackwater and Minley parish wards of Blackwater & Hawley parish, would have 6 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average. The single-member Eversley ward would have 12 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average (7 per cent in 2004). The proposed two-member Hartley Wintney ward would have 7 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average currently (11 per cent in 2004), while the proposed three-member Hook ward would have 2 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average (5 per cent in 2004).

90 At Stage Three, we received four submissions in support of a four-member ward for rural northern Hart to include the parishes of Eversley, Bramshill, Heckfield, Mattingley, Rotherwick, Hartley Wintney and Winchfield. The District Council stated that it supported the case for a four-member ward, having had the opportunity to reflect on the original proposal from the six district councillors. Mattingley Parish Council supported the proposal for a four-member ward and argued that Hook and Rotherwick did not want to be part of the same ward. It also submitted two alternative proposals which included a two-member ward of Mattingley, Rotherwick, Heckfield, Bramshill and Eversley, or this combination with an added West Green ward (taking in part of north-west Hartley Wintney) to increase the electorate. Councillor Susan Band, one of the six councillors who proposed the four-member ward sent an updated case for our consideration. Winchfield Parish Council stated its desire to remain with Hartley Wintney, as the current arrangement stands or as part of a "...comprehensive rural ward of four councillors".

91 Hook Parish Council opposed being placed in a ward with Rotherwick, arguing that the two parishes have different interests. It contended that Hook had sufficient numbers of electorate to justify a three-member ward without being combined with Rotherwick parish.

92 We have given careful consideration to the views we have received regarding these areas. Despite the level of support for a four-member ward at Stage Three, we have not been persuaded that these proposals would offer a better balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria. As we have already mentioned, wards with more than three members could result in an unacceptable dilution of accountability to the electorate. In formulating our final recommendations we sought our own solutions to best reflect the community interests and identities of "rural northern Hart" but have found no viable alternatives to our draft recommendations. In our draft recommendations, we stated that the arguments for a four-member ward did not merit the "exceptional circumstances" which would justify the creation of such a ward. At Stage Three we did not receive any further arguments that would persuade us that a four-member ward should be adopted.

93 While we have noted the preferences of Hook and Winchfield parish councils to retain the existing warding arrangements, we cannot look at any single area in isolation without having regard to the impact which any change would have upon the achievement of electoral equality across the whole of the district. We also note that the submissions of Hook and Winchfield parish councils did not address the resulting electoral imbalances in surrounding wards, and therefore we confirm our draft recommendations for this area as final.

## **Electoral Cycle**

94 At Stage One we received two representations relating to the electoral cycle in Hart District Council. The District Council and Councillor Parker expressed a preference for the electoral cycle to be changed to elections by halves as soon as the necessary legislation is implemented, but proposed retaining elections by thirds until this time. We are guided by the current legislation and therefore propose no change to the Council's present system of elections by thirds.

95 At Stage Three no further comments were received regarding the electoral cycle of Hart, and we confirm our draft recommendation as final.

## **Conclusions**

96 Having considered carefully all the representations and evidence received in response to our consultation report, we have decided substantially to endorse our draft recommendations, subject to the following amendments:

- the boundary between the proposed Fleet North ward and the proposed wards of Fleet Central and Fleet West should be modified to follow the railway line.

97 We conclude that, in Hart:

- a council of 35 members should be retained;
- there should be 18 wards, two more than at present;
- the boundaries of all of the existing wards should be modified;
- the Council should continue to hold elections by thirds.

98 Figure 4 shows the impact of our final recommendations on electoral equality, comparing them with the current arrangements, based on 1999 and 2004 electorate figures.

Figure 4: Comparison of Current and Recommended Electoral Arrangements

	1999 electorate		2004 forecast electorate	
	Current arrangements	Final recommendations	Current arrangements	Final recommendations
Number of councillors	35	35	35	35
Number of wards	16	18	16	18
Average number of electors per councillor	1847	1847	1919	1919
Number of wards with a variance more than 10 per cent from the average	11	4	12	3
Number of wards with a variance more than 20 per cent from the average	8	2	10	1

99 As Figure 4 shows, our final recommendations would result in a reduction in the number of wards with an electoral variance of more than 10 per cent from 11 to four with two wards varying by more than 20 per cent from the district average. This level of electoral equality would improve further in 2004, with three wards varying by more than 10 per cent from the average and only one ward, Fleet North, varying by more than 20 per cent. We conclude that our recommendations would best meet the need for electoral equality, having regard to the statutory criteria.

**Final Recommendation**  
 Hart District Council should comprise 35 councillors serving 18 wards, as detailed and named in Figures 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2 in Appendix A and on the large map inserted at the back of the report. The Council should continue to hold elections by thirds.

**Parish and Town Council Electoral Arrangements**

100 In undertaking reviews of electoral arrangements, we are required to comply as far as is reasonably practicable with the provisions set out in Schedule 11 to the 1972 Act. The Schedule provides that if a parish is to be divided between different district wards, it should also be divided into parish wards, so that each parish ward lies wholly within a single ward of the district. Accordingly, in our draft recommendations report we proposed consequential changes to the warding arrangements for the parishes of Crookham Village, Yateley and Blackwater & Hawley in order to reflect the proposed district wards .

101 The parish of Crookham Village is currently served by eight councillors. At Stage One, the District Council proposed three new parish wards with a new Zebon parish ward comprising the Zebon Copse area, represented by five parish councillors, which would be included in Church Crookham West district ward. A new Netherhouse parish ward, comprising the Netherhouse

Moor area, would be represented by a single parish councillor and included in Fleet West district ward. It argued that these proposals would bring into urban Fleet areas very closely related. The remainder of Crookham Village parish would comprise the Crookham Village parish ward, be represented by two parish councillors, and be included in Crondall district ward.

102 We received opposition to this proposal from Crookham Village Parish Council at Stage One which considered that the whole of the parish should remain within a single district ward, as the District Council’s proposals would “decimate” Crookham Village as a parish in a subsequent parish boundary review. However, our draft recommendations were based on those put forward by the District Council at Stage One and we considered that the inclusion of Zebon parish ward in Church Crookham West ward and Netherhouse parish ward in Fleet West ward would better reflect the more urban nature of these areas, by placing them with the town of Fleet. It would also give the remainder of Crookham Village parish separate representation on the parish council.

103 In response to our consultation report, Zebon Copse Residents’ Association stated its objections to being transferred to Church Crookham West ward, arguing that its social, cultural and administrative links were with Crookham Village. It also argued that our draft proposals would create “unhelpful divisions within the parish council...” and could lead to “subsequent tinkering with parish boundaries”. However, we have not received a significant level of opposition to our draft recommendation and have not been persuaded that Zebon parish ward does not have some affinity to the town of Fleet. We remain of the opinion that our draft recommendation for this area represents the best balance between electoral equality and community identity.

**Final Recommendation**  
Crookham Village Parish Council should comprise eight councillors, as at present, representing three wards: Zebon parish ward (returning five councillors), Netherhouse parish ward (returning a single councillor) and Crookham Village parish ward (returning two councillors). The parish ward boundaries should reflect the proposed district ward boundaries in the area, as illustrated and named on Maps A2, A3 and A4 in Appendix A.

104 The town of Yateley is currently served by 17 town councillors and comprises the four parish wards of Yateley North (returning four councillors), Yateley East (returning four councillors), Yateley West (returning four councillors) and Frogmore & Darby Green ward (returning five councillors). At Stage One, the District Council proposed four minor boundary amendments to the district wards in Yateley, contending that there should also be consequential modifications to the parish wards of the same name. We received no further submissions relating to this area at Stage Three and we are therefore content to put this recommendation forward as part of our final recommendations.

**Final Recommendation**

Yateley Town Council should comprise 17 town councillors, as at present, representing four wards: Yateley North (returning four councillors), Yateley East (returning four councillors), Yateley West (returning four councillors) and Frogmore & Darby Green ward (returning five councillors). The parish ward boundaries should reflect the proposed district ward boundaries in the area, as illustrated and named on the large map at the back of this report.

105 The parish of Blackwater & Hawley is currently served by seven town councillors and comprises the two parish wards of Blackwater and Minley. At Stage One the District Council proposed that a new parish ward be created, with the proposed Ancells parish ward, comprising the Ancells Farm area of Minley parish ward to the south of the M3, represented by a single town councillor, being transferred to the proposed Fleet North district ward. The remainder of the existing Minley ward would be represented by three town councillors. Blackwater & Hawley Town Council support this proposal. We received no further submissions relating to this area at Stage Three and we are therefore content to put this recommendation forward as part of our final recommendations.

**Final Recommendation**

Blackwater & Hawley Town Council should comprise seven councillors, as at present, representing three wards: Ancells parish ward, returning a single councillor, Blackwater parish ward, returning three councillors, and Minley parish ward, returning three councillors. The boundary between the parish wards should reflect the proposed district ward boundary, as illustrated and named on the large map at the back of the report.

106 In our draft recommendations report we proposed that there should be no change to the electoral cycle of parish councils in the district, and are confirming this as final.

**Final Recommendation**

For parish councils, elections should continue to be held at the same time as elections for the principal authority.

107 Hart District Council has undertaken a parish review and submitted recommendations to the Secretary of State for changes to a number of parish boundaries. Should the Secretary of State be minded to accept those recommendations, a number of consequential parish warding proposals contained in this report would no longer be required, and we would be content for any appropriate modifications to be made.

*Map 2: The Commission's Final Recommendations for Hart*

## 6 NEXT STEPS

108 Having completed our review of electoral arrangements in Hart and submitted our final recommendations to the Secretary of State, we have fulfilled our statutory obligation under the Local Government Act 1992.

109 It now falls to the Secretary of State to decide whether to give effect to our recommendations, with or without modification, and to implement them by means of an order. Such an order will not be made before 5 September 2000.

110 All further correspondence concerning our recommendations and the matters discussed in this report should be addressed to:

The Secretary of State  
Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions  
Local Government Sponsorship Division  
Eland House  
Bressenden Place  
London SW1E 5DU



## APPENDIX A

### **Final Recommendations for Hart: Detailed Mapping**

The following maps illustrate the Commission's proposed ward boundaries for the Hart district.

**Map A1** illustrates, in outline form, the proposed ward boundaries within the district and indicates the areas which are shown in more detail in maps A2, A3, and A4 and the large map at the back of the report.

**Map A2** illustrates the proposed warding of Odiham parish.

**Map A3** illustrates the proposed warding of Crookham Village parish (between the district wards of Crondall and Fleet West).

**Map A4** illustrates the proposed warding of Crookham Village parish (between the district wards of Church Crookham West and Crondall).

The **large map** inserted in the back of the report illustrates the proposed warding arrangements for the towns of Fleet and Yateley.

*Map A1: Final Recommendations for Hart: Key Map*

*Map A2: Proposed warding of Odiham parish*

*Map A3: Proposed Warding of Crookham Village Parish (Between the District Wards of Crondall and Fleet West)*

*Map A4: Proposed Warding of Crookham Village Parish (Between the District Wards of Church Crookham West and Crondall)*



## APPENDIX B

### Draft Recommendations for Hart

Our final recommendations, detailed in Figures 1 and 2, differ from those we put forward as draft recommendations in respect of three wards only, where our draft proposals are set out below.

*Figure B1: The Commission's Draft Recommendations: Constituent Areas*

Ward name	Constituent areas
Fleet North	Fleet West ward (part); Hawley ward (part – the Ancells parish ward of Blackwater & Hawley parish)
Fleet Central	Fleet West ward (part); Fleet Pondtail ward (part)
Fleet West	Cron dall ward (part – the proposed Netherhouse parish ward of Crookham Village parish); Fleet West ward (part)

*Figure B2: The Commission's Draft Recommendations: Number of Councillors and Electors by Ward*

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (1999)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2004)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
Fleet North	2	2,181	1,091	-41	3,322	1,661	-13
Fleet Central	2	3,820	1,910	3	3,770	1,885	-2
Fleet West	2	3,840	1,920	4	3,733	1,867	-3

*Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided by Hart District Council.*

*Note: The 'variance from average' column shows by how far, in percentage terms, the number of electors per councillor varies from the average for the borough. The minus symbol (-) denotes a lower than average number of electors. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.*